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Committees: Labor, Commerce, Research & Development, ranking Republican; Health & Long-Term Care; Ways & Means; Rules

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Dear Friends,

Week 4 of the 59th Legislature's 2006 session is coming to an end. On Tuesday, we'll reach the halfway point of the 60-day session.

The first four weeks of session have been dominated by committee hearings, but that will change next week. Today was the cutoff date for Senate bills to be passed by the Senate policy committees. Tuesday is the deadline for the Senate Ways and Means Committee and Senate Transportation Committee to approve measures originating in either panel. Starting Tuesday, we will start devoting our time to Senate floor sessions in which we debate and vote on bills that have survived the committee cutoffs. During this period, we will work evenings and possibly Saturday. The Senate and House will follow this schedule until the February 14 floor cutoff. After that date, we'll revert back to committee meetings in which we'll hear bills that were passed by the House.

Primary Election Update...On February 1, the Senate approved **Senate Bill 6236** moving primary election day to the third Tuesday in August; candidate filing is moved to the first week in June. The vote in the Senate was 37-11. I voted "no" on this bill on a matter of principle. I believe many voters would be on vacation in August and would miss a chance to vote in an August primary. I would be more willing to support this proposal if the primary date was moved to just after Labor Day because most voters would be home from summer vacation by then. The measure is now before the House of Representatives.

Update on bills I've prime-sponsored this session

Here is the latest on the bills that I prime-sponsored this session:

- **Senate Bill 6763** basically calls for the state to recognize hydroelectric power as a renewable energy resource and to encourage its use. This bill, which is important to our

region since it relies on hydropower not only for energy but for part of our economy, received a public hearing yesterday in the Senate Water, Energy and Environment Committee. The issue is whether hydropower is a renewable source of energy. It's very important to hear all sides of this issue, so I'm very pleased that SB 6763 was given the legislative spotlight.

I was especially thrilled that the Water, Energy and Environment Committee heard my proposal yesterday since it was the committee's final meeting before today's deadline for Senate policy committees to pass bills that originated there. I hoped the bill would be discussed publicly so it possibly can be included in a proposed initiative that would require Washington state utility companies to increase the amount of renewable sources in their electricity supply to 15 percent by 2020. This initiative was recently filed with the Secretary of State's Office, but it hasn't been written and submitted. It would be wonderful to come to some agreement and have some discussions while we still have time before the initiative is written and turned in.

Andrew Munro from the Chelan PUD and Chris McCabe of the Association of Washington Business both testified in favor of this proposal.

Hydropower accounts for 74 percent of Washington's electricity, compared to only 7 percent nationally. Washington leads the nation in hydropower capacity. Hydropower is very abundant in the Northwest, and it is cheap compared to other energy sources. It is a clean, renewable source of energy whose production doesn't result in air pollution. We need to consider it as a renewable energy source because it truly is.

- **Senate Bill 6130** requires the Public Employees Benefits Board to make health savings accounts an option for public employees. It is in the Senate Ways and Means Committee, where it will receive a public hearing on Monday, Feb. 6.
- **Substitute Senate Bill 6230** extends the state sales and use tax credit for certain public facilities districts (PFDs). This measure, which was passed this week by the Senate Ways and Means Committee, is designed to help the proposed regional events center associated with the Wenatchee downtown waterfront project. SSB 6230 is on the Senate floor calendar, ready for a vote by the full Senate.
- **Senate Bill 6333** requires voters to provide photo identification when they vote at the polls. It is in the Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee. Valid photo ID would include a valid driver's license, a valid state identification card, a valid U.S. passport or a valid tribal identification card.
- **Senate Bill 6734** freezes our minimum wage at \$7.63 per hour and also requires the Washington State Institute of Public Policy to do an extensive study on how it affects the state economy. Sen. Jim Hargrove's bill (SB 5551) will be the vehicle for discussion on this issue. That measure sits in the Senate Rules Committee.

- **Senate Bill 6625** establishes a habitat and recreational lands coordinating committee to advise the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation and other state agencies on land acquisitions. This bill was passed on Wednesday by the Senate Natural Resources, Ocean and Recreation Committee.
- **Senate Bill 6724** expands the Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' Retirement System (LEOFF) Plan 2 so that a death benefit is available when a Plan 2 member dies as a result of illness while employed. Under the measure, the amount of the death benefit for Plan 2 members would be adjusted annually for inflation, beginning July 1, 2006. The bill received a public hearing in the Senate Ways and Means Committee.
- **Senate Bill 6760** is a constituent-requested measure that prohibits mosquito control districts from issuing fees or a tax on cities, churches, and other entities that are exempt from the property tax. The state Attorney General's Office in 2003 issued an opinion that said mosquito control assessments are not taxes and can be imposed on cities, churches and other entities that are exempt from the property tax. This measure is in the Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee.

Budget Tidbits...just the facts

Sen. Joe Zarelli, the ranking Republican member of the budget-writing Ways and Means Committee, each week publishes *Budget Tidbits...just the facts* on the Senate Republican Web site. This week's edition (Budget Brief #4) deals with SSB 6466, which calls for the creation of a cabinet-level Department of Early Learning. To find this year's editions of Budget Tidbits, go to <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC>, then click on SRC Media Center and scroll down.

Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends alternatives to the WASL

In 2004, the Legislature authorized the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop alternatives to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) for students who have twice failed the 10th grade WASL in all subjects. The Legislature said these alternatives must be competitive in rigor and must demonstrate required skills.

The Legislature must approve these alternatives, which were introduced this year as **Senate Bill 6461** and **Senate Bill 6618**. SB 6461 had a public hearing in the education committee on January 19, but has not been acted on. This bill would use multiple measures, including a student's GPA and senior culminating project for a weighted assessment. SB 6618 originally would use a student's portfolio, college entrance exam scores and a culturally appropriate test in place of the WASL. However, SB 6618 was amended in the education committee and is now a study to determine the characteristics of the students who fail the WASL, to identify and review additional alternative assessment options, and to identify and review a combination of performance measures to assess whether a student has met the state learning standards.

● **The Republican Commitment to Washington promises to help every student achieve the WASL standards and graduate on time by offering remedial classes, tutors and expanded summer school programs.**

State's "Three-Strikes" law has huge loophole that needs to be fixed

In 1993, Washington voters approved a "Three Strikes You're Out" law that requires mandatory life sentences for three-time violent felony offenders. Unfortunately, a man who later killed a child was released on appeal from his life sentence because one of his "three strikes" crimes was committed in another state. **Senate Bill 6829** closes this loophole. It says any out-of-state conviction for a felony offense that resulted in a sentence of ten years or more, counts as a strike under the state's "Three Strikes You're Out" law. SB 6829 was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. If it becomes law, it will be known as the Chelsea Harrison Act in memory of the girl who died because the appeals court relieved her killer of his life sentence.

Transportation Committee hears bill to create special "Support Our Troops" license plates

Last year, the Legislature authorized an Armed Services license plate series for every branch of the service, including the National Guard. These plates are available now, and \$28 of the \$35 annual renewal fee goes directly to veterans programs. This year, **Senate Bill 6830** was introduced to provide funds to help the families of active duty military personnel killed or seriously injured in action. A national nonprofit organization, Support Our Troops, Inc., is trying to get these license plates on the road in 41 states by this summer. The measure was given a public hearing on February 1 in the Senate Transportation Committee.

As always, I greatly appreciate your comments, ideas and questions about the issues covered in my weekly e-updates. Your input helps me serve you better. Have a great week!

Sincerely,

Linda

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